



On Jan. 20 a letter came from the JPC (Judicial Process Commission) of GEM (Genesee Ecumenical Ministries) which seems to reflect the priorities of many religious groups that purport to promote the Kingdom of God.

The letter was occasioned by the execution of Gary Gilmore, the murderer of two young fathers of families. It was concerned that the death penalty for murder is a sign that we "are hardly closer to the Kingdom" because of the execution. It continues: "It is a symptom of the cycle of violence that continues to hold our society in its grip."

What did the religious leaders want us to do? 1) Give a minute of silent prayer for the victims of violence and the perpetrators of violence. To this we say: "Right on." 2) Read to our congregations a long Declaration prepared by GEM and other Rochester area religious leaders. To this we say: "Bunkum."

The Declaration says: "As a response to crime, the death penalty is more an act of naked vengeance than of protection, an act as desperate and impulsive as the crimes it seeks to prevent, an act as inhuman as those to which it is a response."

Those who remember the Manson Family murders, and other such crimes, including the recent brutal killing of a kindly old lady in Williamson, and a crippled woman in Rochester, will indignantly reject this snide allegation. Surely anyone who would support such allegations would condemn Christ for His promise: "And to the wicked shall I say: 'Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting hell fire. For I was hungry and you gave me not to eat.' (Mt. 25:42.) It would be far better to be shot or gassed or electrocuted, with plenty of time to prepare for a good death, than to die unrepentant and face the promised justice of God to eternal misery."

Regarding the "naked vengeance" myth, that is contemptible dishonesty. It insinuates that we who condone Capital Punishment are wildly happy about the affair. Do you remember the history of Mayor Lynch of Galway, Ireland? His son murdered a Spanish friend and guest. Irish law in the 16th century required hanging for murder. The judge was Mayor Lynch himself, and he gave the verdict to his own son. But the son was so beloved by the people of Galway that no one could be found to execute the law. Finally the father, who had passed the judgment of the law, stepped forward, embraced his son, and hanged him before the people. And the father died of a broken heart a year later. This was retributive justice. It was not "naked vengeance."

The Church has always taught that punishment can be medicinal, or it can be retributive and condign. Medicinal punishment, e.g. punishment with the hope of rehabilitation is surely worthy of consideration in most cases. But retributive punishment is not to be rejected. The purpose of such justice is the preservation of society. With capital punishment, sometimes it is a deterrent to crime. Statistics prove nothing. Sometimes capital punishment removes from the social body individuals who are so evil that they are like gangrenous limbs. Society is served by their just removal.

After reading the Declaration I phoned the GEM director and asked: "What is the stand of GEM on abortion?" He explained that GEM has had two reorganizations in five years, and the question has never come up. He said: "This is a subject about which there is sincere disagreement among Christian bodies and Christian people."

Before me was a vision of those beautiful babies whose bottoms were being diapered with absorbing pampers by loving mothers on the TV ads. And there came a simultaneous vision of the thousands of little babies burned in their mothers' wombs with saline solutions, or chopped to death by the doctor's curette. I thanked the director for the strange information. I leave it to the reader to meditate on the priorities of any religious leaders who would call us to anguish over retributive justice toward murderers, and who straddle the fence and remain silent over the destruction of innocent babies.

**Clergy Back Rights for Homosexuals**

Msgr. George Cocuzzi, vicar for urban ministry, is among four area clergymen who have signed a statement urging pastoral concern for, and legal protection of the rights of, homosexuals.

The statement also was signed by Rev. Eugene M. Ferguson of the United Methodist Church, Rev. Bruce Hansen of the Episcopal Church, and Rabbi Judea B. Miller of Temple B'rith Kodesh.

The statement reads: "We believe that all people are children of God, regardless of their sexual orientation, and have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church and Synagogue."

"We express our conviction that homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection of the law with all other citizens (including employment and housing), and we call upon our society to see that such protection is provided in actuality."

We also believe that private sexual acts between consenting adults are not the proper province of government and enforcement agencies."

Msgr. Cocuzzi noted that the statement was made "personally," and did not imply a sanction by the Diocese of Rochester.



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